HICKMAN DEFENSE RALLY

Sunday, Sept. 28

3:00 P.M.

Metropolitan Community Church

41st & So. Parkway

Speakers:

TALLULAH BANKHEAD
Radio, Stage and Screen Star

RALPH HELSTEIN
Int'l Pres., United Packinghouse Workers of America

WILLARD MOTLEY
Author of "Knock on Any Door"

RICHARD ROBER
Star of "Call Me Mister"

HENRY McGEE
Pres. Chicago Branch N.A.A.C.P.

Other AFL and CIO Leaders

Send Funds and Contributions to:

Hickman Defense Com.
4619 S. PARKWAY
BOU. 8942

561

HELP FREE James Hickman!

This is a picture of Mr. and Mrs. Hickman and three of their four children: Elvina, 9; Sylvester, 7; and Velvena, 3. Shortly after this picture was taken these three children and Leslie, 14 were trapped in the flaming attic and burned to death.

WHO IS JAMES HICKMAN?

James Hickman is in jail awaiting trial for murder. He brought his family here from the south in search of security and happiness. He found no happiness. He didn't even find a home. An unscrupulous landlord, David Coleman took $100.00 from him and crammed his family of nine into a tiny attic cubicle without water, lights, gas or protection from fire. James Hickman said "We lived like rats in a hole." Then Coleman ordered his tenants out, so he could divide the "apartments" into "kitchenettes" and make more money. When they refused to go, he threatened to burn them out.

One night while Hickman was working, the attic was swept by flames. His four youngest children were burned alive. This was more agony than any man could stand. So James Hickman took a gun and killed David Coleman.

THERE ARE MILLIONS OF JAMES HICKMANS

The story of James Hickman is the story of millions of common people who are victims of the scandalous housing shortage and of landlords greed. James Hickman's action was not an answer to the problem but it was an expression of the frustration, and resentment of the underprivileged against those responsible for their misery.

THE REAL CRIMINALS ARE REAL ESTATE INTERESTS WHO PUT PROFITS ABOVE THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE.

THE REAL CRIMINALS ARE THOSE WHO FOSTER RACIAL SEGREGATION AND CONDEMN MILLIONS TO THE CONGESTED, VERMIN-INFESTED FIRE-TRAPS OF THE BLACK GHETTO.

THE REAL CRIMINALS ARE THE PUBLIC OFFICIALS WHO PERMIT LANDLORDS TO VIOLATE ALL SAFETY REGULATIONS, AND REFUSE TO LAUNCH A PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAM TO RELIEVE THE SHORTAGE.

Demand an end to fire traps, slums, and rent gauging.
Organize Tenant Leagues!
Demand an end to racial segregation!
Demand a large scale low-rental Public Housing Program!

SUMMARY OF FACTS IN THE JAMES HICKMAN CASE

James Hickman is in jail charged with the murder of David Coleman Landlord of the Building at 1733 Washburne Avenue, in which Mr. Hickman and his family formerly lived. On January 16, 1947, a fire swept the attic in which the Hickman family "lived" without gas, lights, water or fire escapes. Four of the children were burned to death. Prior to the fire, David Coleman had threatened to burn the tenants out of the building. Overcome by grief at the loss of his children and believing David Coleman to be responsible for their death Mr. Hickman shot him on July 16th.

James Hickman came to Chicago in 1945 and secured a job in the steel mills. After looking for a place to live for many months, Mr. Hickman contacted David Coleman who promised him a four room flat on the second floor at 1733 Washburne Ave. The flat was not vacant at the time. Mr. Hickman paid $100.00 for two months rent in advance and was promised two rooms until the flat was available. Instead, he and his wife and 7 of his children were forced to live in an attic room 14' by 14' with no water, gas, or lights and only one small window.

On the night of January 16, fire swept through the attic and the four youngest children were burned to death. They were Leslie, 14; Elvena, 9; Sylvester, 7; and Velvena, 3. The mother Anna and two sons, Willis and Charles escaped with injuries. Mr. Hickman and James Hickman Jr. were working at the time of the fire.

Testimony presented at the Coroner's Inquest into the death of the children and at the hearings before the city's fire attorney indicated that the fire may have been deliberately set in order to increase the owner's revenue. Tenants of the building stated that an unidentified man was in the building the night of the fire and warned some of the tenants to leave because the building was on fire. A kerosene can of a type not used in the building was found by the attic doorway after the fire. Witnesses testified that Coleman had on numerous occasions stated that he wanted to evict the tenants so that he could convert the flats into kitchenettes, thus considerable increasing his income. They testified that Coleman stated he would do anything to get the tenants out "even if it takes a fire to do it".

The coroner's jury in its February 27th verdict was unable to decide whether the fire was incendiary in origin. They recommended that the case be turned over to the State's Attorney for further investigation "with emphasis on housing conditions particularly in segregated areas, affecting human lives." The State's Attorney, to our knowledge has never carried out a thorough investigation of the circumstances surrounding the fire.

Grief stricken over the death of his children, Mr. Hickman on July 16th shot Coleman in the justifiable belief that he was responsible for the death of his children. Hickman claims that Coleman confessed to him that he had set fire to the building. The coroner's jury at the inquest into the death Coleman termed the shooting as "murder" and ordered Hickman held to the Grand Jury on that charge.

DEFEND HICKMAN!

JAMES HICKMAN, formerly of 1733 Washburne Ave, is in the County jail charged with the murder of David Coleman, landlord of the building in which Mr. Hickman's four children were burned to death last January 16th. They are going to try to have James Hickman electrocuted or sent to prison for many long years.

JAMES HICKMAN IS NO CRIMINAL..... He is an honest, hard working man. He tried to find a decent home for his family, but all he found was misery, wretchedness and suffering. He was cheated and victimized, and finally HIS FOUR YOUNGEST CHILDREN WERE MURDERED.

On the night of January 16th, while he was at work his family were trapped by fire in their wretched attic room. His wife and son Willis dropped from the attic window four flights to the pavement - they will suffer from their injuries for the rest of their lives. But his four babies were burned alive.

WHO ARE THE MURDERERS?

The real estate interests and reactionary congressmen who have sabotaged a public housing program to provide decent homes for the people; those responsible for RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS which result in overcrowded, unsanitary and unsafe conditions in the black ghetto, endangering the health and life of hundreds of thousands; greedy unscrupulous landlords such as Coleman who seek to profit from the misery of the unfortunate - THESE ARE THE MURDERERS!!!

FREE JAMES HICKMAN

The Hickman family has suffered enough! The survivors of his grief stricken family need him. He must be permitted to return to them, to provide for them and to comfort them.

THEY ARE DEPENDING ON US - THEIR NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS - TO HELP SAVE HIS LIFE AND RESTORE HIS FREEDOM. WE MUST NOT FAIL THEM IN THEIR HOUR OF NEED.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Come to the mass meeting and bring your neighbors.
2. Help raise funds for Hickman's defense (collection lists are available at the West Side Civic Center - 1841 W. Roosevelt Rd)
3. Have your organization affiliate to the West Side Hickman Defense Committee and contribute to the defense fund.

Issued by the WEST SIDE HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE
WEST SIDE CIVIC CENTER
1841 W. ROOSEVELT ROAD.

MASS MEETING

DEFEND HICKMAN

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 13 8 P.M.

GREATER MT. SINAI BAPTIST CHURCH

1421 WASHBURNE AVE.

SPEAKERS

M. J. MEYER
Attorney For Mr. Hickman

WILLOUGHBY ABNER
1st Vice-President CIO COUNCIL

CHARLES CHIAKULAS
President Local 477, UAW CIO

KATHERINE NORMAN
Chicago Area Tenants Union

REV. V. B. WATTS
Pastor, Greater Progressive

A. MILES CARTMAN
Executive Board Member
(NAACP)

MRS. WILLA JONES

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MRS. WILLA JONES

Hickman Defense Committee

4619 SOUTH PARKWAY
Telephone BOU. 8842
CHICAGO, 15

West Side Branch
WEST SIDE CIVIC CENTER
1841 W. ROOSEVELT RD.
CHICAGO, ILL.

Chairman
WILLOUGHBY ABNER

Secretary
BERNICE HOWARD

Treasurer
CHARLES CHIAKULLAS

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REV. HOWARD SPRAGG
ALBERT TOWERS
RABBI JACOB WEINSTEIN
DOC WILLIAMS
HUGH WILL
JOHN YANCEY
EDITH ZASILOW

September 2, 1947.

Dear Friend:

There will be an important meeting of the Hickman Defense Committee at the Parkway Community Center at 7:30 P.M. Friday September 5th. Important items for discussion are the projected mass meeting and the financial drive.

Sincerely yours,

Willoughby Abner

WILLOUGHBY ABNER

WA/mr

HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE
4619 SO. PARKWAY
CHICAGO 15, ILL.
BOU. 8942

☐ Enclosed is the resolution passed by our organization

☐ Enclosed is a check for _____, donated by our Organization to aid the defense.

☐ Please send us _____ collection lists.

☐ We have elected _____ to represent our organization on the Hickman Defense Committee.

Name of organization _____

Please return this form as soon as possible.

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE DEFENSE OF JAMES HICKMAN

WHEREAS, James Hickman, father of the four children burned to death last January in a fire trap at 1733 Washburne Ave shot and killed the landlord of the said building on July 16, 1947 in belief that he was responsible for the death of his children and is now awaiting trial for murder of the said landlord, David Coleman, and

WHEREAS, it is our belief that James Hickman committed this act because of his terrible grief and the dreadful housing conditions under which he was forced to live, and

WHEREAS, it is our belief that the real responsibility for the shooting and for Mr, Hickman's plight is the terrible housing situation in the City of Chicago,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Chicago Council of the Building Service Employees Union

goes on record in favor of the defense of James Hickman and will give its aid to that defense.

September 4, 1947

Thomas Burke, Secy.
Chicago Council BSEIU
509 S. Wabash
Chicago 5, Ill.

Dear Brother Burke:

In line with the request of the chairman of the Council I am presenting in writing a proposal for consideration of the executive board of the Council:

1- That an educational committee be selected to handle a program for education;

2- That this committee serve without pay and that the savings go toward financing various classes and other educational activities;

3- That the other administrative and publicity tasks of the Council be handled by the Executive Board and the chairman.

Fraternally,

Sid Lens

with the murder of his landlord? In part it flowed from man's natural compassion for a fellow man in distress, but it was far more than that. It was a splendid demonstration of the instinctive solidarity of working men and women.

Hickman's entire life, and his indescribable tragedy dramatized the plight of tens of millions who are doomed in our society to poverty, exploitation, and discrimination. He was born in the cotton fields of Mississippi, condemned from boyhood to a life of backbreaking toil which permitted him to eke out the very barest existence. He came north to Chicago, in search for a better life for his family. He was deprived of the first prerequisite: a decent place to live. There were mansions for the rich, but no home for the Hickman family. His family of nine was broken up and scattered in three different places, and finally brought together in an uninhabitable tiny attic room without water, lights, gas or toilet. He was swindled by an unscrupulous landlord, who took advantage of his desperate plight to extort $100 from his meager savings for a promise of an apartment which he never got. He was then ordered to move and threatened with fire when he refused. Finally, he suffered a loss which cannot possibly be measured in terms of material values: his four youngest children burned alive--caught in a trap from which there was no escape.

Was this an accident, for which no one was blame as the state's attorney declared to the jury? An act of God? No! It was no accident. His landlord had threatenad fire if Hickman did not move. At the coroner's inquest, evidence of arson was introduced. Coleman, the landlord, admitted before he died, that he had set the fire. Even if he did not, was it <u>really</u>

an accident? Was it an accident that the Hickmans were compelled to live in this man trap? Or was it because the government, under orders from the real estate interests have refused to build homes for the needy? Was it an accident that there was no fire escape, no fire extinguisher, no water, no protection whatever? Or was it because of a greedy landlord and public officials who permit these inhuman profiteers to violate all of the fire and health ordinances? Was it an accident that the Hickmans were compelled to find shelter within the confines of the horrible slums of the black ghetto? Or was it because of racial segregation and restrictive covenants fostered by real estate interests, supported by the legislatures which refuse to outlaw these practices, and upheld by the courts? No, it was no accident. No more than the fiery death of dozens of other human beings in Chicago in the past year. And, if these conditions are not remedied, there will be many more such "accidents."

That is why the people rushed to the defense of James Hickman. They did not justify his action in killing the landlord, but neither did they blame him. They understood that he was driven to this deed out of desperation and despair, and they knew that the real criminals had not been indicted. Many of them said as Willard Motley did, " ...perhaps I too, or almost any other man, would have done the same thing as he had done, given the same circumstances." They did not want the state to persecute Hickman further; they wanted him to be given a chance to return to his family. Above all, they wanted to expose and indict the social crimes which led to this tragedy, and to demand justice for the millions of underprivileged.

The Hickman case has drawn to a conclusion. If our campaign has done nothing more than win liberty for James Hickman, it has been worthwhile. But we hope it has done more than that. We hope it has served to indict the powers that be for their crimes against the people: refusing to provide adequate, safe and sanitary housing, and herding the Negro people into Nazi-like ghettos thatbreed disease, misery and death. We hope that our campaign will help bring about a powerful movement that will put an end to these outrages so that working men like James Hickman and their families may live out their lives in peace, comfort and happiness.

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For further information, contact Willoughby Abner, Chairman of the Hickman Defense Committee, at the office of the Chicago Industrial Union Council (CIO), 205 W. Wacker Drive, Fra. 2432.

The long and sustained campaign to free James Hickman, Negro steelworker accused of the murder of his landlord, came to an end on Tuesday December 16th when Hickman walked out of the Cook County jail on probation for two years. The Assistant State's Attorney, Samuel Freedman, admitted in his remarks to Judge Rudolph Desort asking for the probation, that the action of the authorities was based in no small degree on the basis of the letters, telegrams and other forms of pressure put on the State by people in every part of the United States.

Hickman's four youngest children were burned to death in a fire on January 16, 1947. Smarting under this loss Hickman sought out the landlord, David Coleman, exactly six months later on July 16 and shot him. The landlord had threatened to burn the building down on a number of occasions and admitted to Hickman on the day of the shooting that he actually had set fire to the old, rickety, fire-trap on January 16th.

Following the shooting a committee of representatives of labor and progressive elements was organized in Chicago and spread its tentacles to a score of other cities from coast to coast. Heading the Hickman Defense Committee was Willoughby Abner, first Vice-President of the Chicago Industrial Union Council. The committee engaged three attorneys, MJ. Myer, Leon Despres and William Temple to fight the case. In a number of press releases the committee made it clear that it does not condone shooting of landlords as a solution to the social evil of Negro ghettos and rent gouging, but that Hickman was a victim of these evils and a symbol of Jim Crow segregation and the shameful apathy of our social system to the problem of tenants and poor workers.

The Hickman trial started on November 5th and ended 9 days later in a mistrial. The jury disagreed on a verdict, with a majority for acquittal and a minority for a convictio on the murder charge. Another trial was set for January 5th 1947, when the States' Attorney and the Hickman counsel came to an agreement which culminated in the reduction of the charge to "manslaughter", a plea of "guilty" and the probation period.

The Hickman Defense Committee raised over $4,000 in the course of its five month campaign. A mass meeting held in September was addressed by Tallulah Bankhead, Willard

Motley (list other names, etc.)

Prominent people and organizations interested in the Hickman Defense included: (list names from letterheads).

The defense Committee, through its steering committee of Charles Chiakulus, Michael Bertell, Abner and Sid Lens, today expressed its thanks to the representatives of millions of people who lent their support to this campaign.

ordered by the judge. Several hours later, Hickman was on his way home with his family, amidst much rejoicing. What had promised to be a very sad Christmas for the Hickmans had turned into a joyous celebration.

It should be clearly understood that this happy outcome did not result from a change of heart on the part of the State. The State's Attorney made this amply clear in supporting the recommendation of probation, when he held up in his hand a sheaf of letters, resolutions and telegrams received from all parts of the country demanding freedom for Hickman. He pointed out that these communications, coming from very large organizations, represented the sentiments of great numbers who had taken an interest in this case. He reported that these were only a small part of the flood of communications his office had received from labor and liberal organizations, as well as from prominent individuals of entertainment, art and professional circles. It was this mass pressure more than anything else that won Hickman's freedom.

It should also be pointed out that this outcome could not have occured had we not successfully defeated the attempt of the state to secure a conviction on the murder charge in the first trial. It is reported that the jury was divided 7 to 5 in favor of acquittal. As a result the state was very doubtful that it could ever win a verdict of guilty and a jail term. This too was borne out in the speech of the state's attorney, when he referred to the results of the first trial, and speculated that further attempts to convict Hickman of murder would result in another or even a series of mistrials.

Also contributing greatly to the victory was the supberb legal defense provided by our very able attorneys M.J. Myer, Leon Despres, and William Temple.

As statement of the committee (enclosed) declares, if our work has resulted in nothing more than Hickman's freedom, it has been very much worthwhile. We are certain, however, that our campaign has done more than that. It has helped to turn the searchlight of publicity on the scandalous housing shortage, and especially on the terrible conditions that prevail in the Negro ghettos. We are confident that our campaign has contributed in some measure toward bringing about a movement which will put an end to suffering, homelessness and racial segregation.

We have fought a good fight, and all those who have participated in it can feel proud of this fine accomplishment. We have saved a fellow worker and victim of social injustice from possible execution or a long prison sentence, and in the process we have spoken out on behalf of all who are victims of the housing shortage and of racial segregation.

We wish at this time to convey to you at James Hickman's request, his gratitude for your efforts on his behalf. He has asked that all of his friends be told that he will never forget the wonderful support he received in his hour of need, without which he would undoubtedly have been railroaded to prison or possibly the electric chair.

We are happy to report that the financial situation is in fair shape, and it appears that after all obligations are paid, there will be some funds on hand. We are therefore immediately ceasing all fund-raising activities. The surplus funds will be presented to the Hickman family to compensate in some measure for his loss of wages during his five-months' imprisonment while awaiting trial.

Those of you who generously responded to our second appeal for funds will receive a refund of your second donation if you desire. If you prefer to have these contributions added to the Hickman donation, that will be done. Please notify us of your wishes on this matter at once.

After all funds are in and the finances cleared up, a complete financial statement will be drawn up and mailed to all committees, field representatives, contributing organizations and individuals, advisory and executive board members, and generally to all interested parties. This will necessarily take several weeks.

Thanking you for your support and cooperation,

Sincerely yours,

WILLOUGHBY ABNER, CHAIRMAN
HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE

WILLOUGHBY ABNER, Chairman BERNICE HOWARD, Secretary CHARLES CHIAKULAS, Treasurer

Hickman Defense Committee

4619 SOUTH PARKWAY
Telephone BOU. 8942
CHICAGO, 15

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RABBI JACOB WEINSTEIN
DOC WILLIAMS
HUGH WILL
JOHN YANCEY
EDITH ZASLOW

Dec. 20, 1947

TO ALL ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE SUPPORTED THE CAMPAIGN TO FREE JAMES HICKMAN:

Dear Friends:

It is with great jubilation that we report that James Hickman is at home with his family -- a free man. The splendid campaign that we have conducted to win Hickman's freedom has ended in a clear-cut victory. This triumph could not have been achieved without your support, and that of thousands of others.

This news will no doubt come as a great surprise to you, since the date for the second trial had been set for January 5th. The developments leading to this culmination were so rapid, and of such a nature, that it was deemed unwise to spread the information widely until Hickman was actually released.

This is the story. Early in December, the States' Atterney's office offered a proposal for a quick settlement of the case. The proposal was that the state would drop the charge of murder, and instead recommend a sentence of 2 years probation on a conviction of manslaughter, providing the defendent would plead guilty to this lesser charge. If the defense agreed to this proposal, then the trial date would be moved up to December 16th, on which day Hickman would be released. The alternative, of course, would be another murder trial, with the risk of conviction and a minimum sentence of 14 years. The Hickman family, after consultation with the committee and the attorneys decided to accept this proposal, and consequently, on December 16th he pleaded guilty to manslaughter, the recommendation of the defense council for 2 years' probation was supported by the States' Attorney and so

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

American Veterans Committee, Chicago Area Council
Baptist Ministers Conference of Chicago
Building Service Employees International Union, AFL, Chicago Council
Chicago Industrial Union Council, CIO
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Chicago Chapter
Progressive Steel Workers of America; Independent
West Side Hickman Defense Committee, Chicago
Workers Defense League

FIELD REPRESENTATIVES

Alex Blackman—Newark, New Jersey
Frieda Charles—New York, N. Y.
Jean Simon—Los Angeles, Calif.
Bernice Stark—Morgantown, W. Virginia
Arthur Sternberg—St. Paul, Minn.
Charles Gladstone—Detroit, Mich.

Hickman Defense Committee

4619 SOUTH PARKWAY
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CHICAGO, ILL.

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REV. HOWARD SPRAGG
ALBERT TOWERS
RABBI JACOB WEINSTEIN
DOC WILLIAMS
HUGH WILL
JOHN YANCEY
EDITH ZASILOW

September 2, 1947

Dear Brother:

Enclosed is a brief summary of the Hickman case. As you can see from this summary, James Hickman is no criminal, but a workingman who is the victim of social conditions which brought about this terrible tragedy.

James Hickman has suffered agony beyond description. His four youngest children were caught in a trap and burned to death. His wife and son dropped four flights to the pavement below and as a result, sustained injuries from which they will suffer for the rest of their days.

Mr. Hickman is no murderer - he is the victim of circumstances. He is a victim of the terrible housing shortage, restrictive covenents which gave rise to the super congestion of the ghetto, and of an unscrupulous landlord who sought to profiteer from misery.

James Hickman is in a fight for his life. The labor, liberal and progressive forces cannot stand aside from this fight, for there are deep-going social issues invloved in it. The campaign to defend James Hickman's life, is also a campaign to alleviate the scandalous housing conditions which led to this tragedy.

All progressive forces must rally to this cause. If James Hickman is executed, a great injustice will have been done.

Your local can help to save James Hickman's life. Here is what you can do:

1- Pass the enclosed resolution and send it to the Hickman Defense Committee.

2- Send as large a donation as you possibly can to aid in the defense.

3- Circulate collection lists. Copies will be sent on request.

4- Elect a representative to the Hickman defense Committee.

There is very little time left. The trial is set for September 29th. Funds and expressions of support are needed as soon as possible.

Fraternally yours,
Willoughby Abner, Chairman
HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE

SUMMARY OF FACTS IN THE JAMES HICKMAN CASE

James Hickman is in jail charged with the murder of David Coleman Landlord of the Building at 1733 Washburne Avenue, in which Mr. Hickman and his family formerly lived. On January 16, 1947, a fire swept the attic in which the Hickman family "lived" without gas, lights, water or fire escapes. Four of the children were burned to death. Prior to the fire, David Coleman had threatened to burn the tenants out of the building. Overcome by grief at the loss of his children and believing David Coleman to be responsible for their death Mr. Hickman shot him on July 16th.

James Hickman came to Chicago in 1945 and secured a job in the steel mills. After looking for a place to live for many months, Mr. Hickman contacted David Coleman who promised him a four room flat on the second floor at 1733 Washburne Ave. The flat was not vacant at the time. Mr. Hickman paid $100.00 for two months rent in advance and was promised two rooms until the flat was available. Instead, he and his wife and 7 of his children were forced to live in an attic room 14' by 14' with no water, gas, or lights and only one small window.

On the night of January 16, fire swept through the attic and the four youngest children were burned to death. They were Leslie, 14; Elvena, 9; Sylvester, 7; and Velvena, 3. The mother Anna and two sons, Willis and Charles escaped with injuries. Mr. Hickman and James Hickman Jr. were working at the time of the fire.

Testimony presented at the Coroner's Inquest into the death of the children and at the hearings before the city's fire attorney indicated that the fire may have been deliberately set in order to increase the owner's revenue. Tenants of the building stated that an unidentified man was in the building the night of the fire and warned some of the tenants to leave because the building was on fire. A kerosene can of a type not used in the building was found by the attic doorway after the fire. Witnesses testified that Coleman had on numerous occasions stated that he wanted to evict the tenants so that he could convert the flats into kitchenettes, thus considerable increasing his income. They testified that Coleman stated he would do anything to get the tenants out "even if it takes a fire to do it".

The coroner's jury in its February 27th verdict was unable to decide whether the fire was incendiary in origin. They recommended that the case be turned over to the State's Attorney for further investigation "with emphasis on housing conditions particularly in segregated areas, affecting human lives." The State's Attorney, to our knowledge has never carried out a thorough investigation of the circumstances surrounding the fire.

Grief striken over the death of his children, Mr. Hickman on July 16th shot Coleman in the justifiable belief that he was responsible for the death of his children. Hickman claims that Coleman confessed to him that he had set fire to the building. The coroner's jury at the inquest into the death Coleman termed the shooting as "murder" and ordered Hickman held to the Grand Jury on that charge.

STATEMENT BY THE HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE UPON RELEASE OF JAMES HICKMAN FROM PRISON

On December 16th, James Hickman walked out of the Cook County jail a free man--free to return to his family and to pick up the pieces of his shattered life. The successful fight to save Hickman's life and liberty constitutes a great victory for the labor and progressive organizations and liberals who rallied to the defense of this unfortunate victim of social injustice. It constitutes a victory for the millions of victims of the housing shortage and racial ghettos for whom Hickman has become a symbol.

This triumph can be attributed to the whole hearted response of hundreds of thousands to the appeal of the Hickman Defense Committee. The most powerful support came from the ranks of labor, but support flowed in from many other sources: from the Negro people, the veterans, the churches, the storekeepers, and the professions. They assisted in every way that they could: through mass meetings, resolutions, letters, financial contributions, placing collection cans in their stores, circulating collection lists, and attending the sessions of the trial. Organizations representing more than a million people from all parts of the country threw their support to Hickman's fight for freedom. Thousands of dollars were donated to assure the best possible defense.

James Hickman was a laborer at International Harvester's Wisconsin Steel mill, who had spent most of his life as a sharecropper in Mississippi. He was an obscure working man without money, prestige, or influence. How then explain this tremendous support to his defense, when he faced trial charged

WILLOUGHBY ABNER, Chairman BERNICE HOWARD, Secretary CHARLES CHIAKULAS, Treasurer

Hickman Defense Committee

4619 SOUTH PARKWAY
Telephone BOU. 8942
CHICAGO, 15

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James Hickman was a laborer at International Harvester's Wisconsin Steel Mill, who had spent most of his life as a sharecropper in Mississippi. He was an obscure working man, without money, prestige or influence. How then explain the tremendous numbers that came to his defense? In part, it flowed from man's natural compassion for a fellow man in distress, but it was far more than that. It was a splendid demonstration of the instinctive solidarity of working men and women.

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS
American Veterans Committee, Chicago Area Council
Baptist Ministers Conference of Chicago
Building Service Employees International Union, AFL, Chicago Council
Chicago Industrial Union Council, CIO
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Chicago Chapter
Progressive Steel Workers of America, Independent
West Side Hickman Defense Committee, Chicago
Workers Defense League

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Alex Blackman—Newark, New Jersey
Frieda Charles—New York, N. Y.
Jean Simon—Los Angeles, Calif.
Bernice Stark—Morgantown, W. Virginia
Arthur Sternberg—St. Paul, Minn.
Charles Gladstone--Detroit, Mich.

Hickman's entire life, and his indescribable tragedy dramatized the plight of tens of millions who are doomed in our society to poverty, exploitation and discrimination. He was born in Mississippi, condemned from boyhood to a life of backbreaking toil in the cotton fields, which permitted him to eke out the very barest existence. He came north, to Chicago, to search for a better life for his family. He was deprived of the first prerequisite: a decent place to live. There were mansions for the rich, but no home for the Hickman family. His family of nine was broken up and scattered in three different places, and finally brought together in an uninhabitable tiny attic room without water, lights, gas or toilet. He was swindled by an unscrupulous landlord, who took advantage of his desperate plight to extort $100 from his meager savings for the promise of an apartment which he never got. He was then ordered to move, and threatened when he refused. Finally, he suffered a loss which cannot possibly be measured in terms of material values: his four youngest children burned alive - caught in a trap from which there was no escape.

Was this an accident, for which no one was to blame, as the state's attorney declared to the jury? An act of God? No! It was no accident. His landlord had threatened fire if Hickman did not move. At the coroner's inquest, evidence of arson was introduced. Coleman, the landlord, admitted before he died, that he had set fire to the building. Even if he did not, was it <u>really</u> an accident? Was it an accident that the Hickmans were compelled to live in this man trap? Or was it because the government, under orders from the real estate interests refused to build homes for the needy? Was it an accident that there was no fire escape, no fire extinguisher, no water, no protection whatever? Or was it because of a greedy landlord and public officials who permit these inhuman profiteers to violate all of the fire and health ordinances? Was it an accident that the Hickmans were compelled to find shelter within the confines of the horrible slums of the black ghetto? Or was it because of racial segregation and restrictive covenants fostered by real estate interests, supported by the legislatures which refuse to outlaw these practices and upheld by the courts? No, it was no accident. No more than the fiery death of dozens of other human beings in Chicago in the past year. And, if these conditions are not remedied, there will be many more such "accidents".

That is why the people rushed to the defense of James Hickman. They did not justify his action in killing the landlord, but neither did they blame him. They understood that he was driven to this deed out of desperation and despair, and they knew that the real criminals had not been indicted. Many of them said as Willard Motley did "... perhaps I too, or almost any other man, would have done the same thing as he had done, given the same circumstances."

They did not want the state to persecute Hickman any furhter, they wanted him to be permitted to return to his family, so that he might try to recover some measure of peace and happiness. Above all they wanted to expose and indict those guilty of the social crimes which lead to this tragedy, and to demand justice for the millions of underprivileged.

The Hickman case has drawn to a conclusion. If our campaign has done nothing more than win liberty for Mr. Hickman, it has been worthwhile. But we hope it has done more than that. We hope it has served to indict the powers that be for crimes against the people, in refusing to provide adequate and safe housing, and in herding the Negro people into Nazi-like ghettos that breed disease, misery and death. We hope that our campaign will help bring about a powerful movement that will put an end to these outrages, so that working men like James Hickman and their families may live out their lives in peace, comfort, and happiness.

WILLOUGHBY ABNER, Chairman BERNICE HOWARD, Secretary CHARLES CHIAKULAS, Treasurer

Hickman Defense Committee

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JOHN YANCEY
EDITH ZASLOW

December 31, 1947

Dear Friend:

The Chicago Negro Art Theater is presenting a stage production "A Home To Live In" on January 8th and 9th. The group presenting the play is an interracial one which concerns itself primarily with productions delivering a social message. This is the same group that presented the excellant play "Stevedore".

The Hickman Defense Committee has endorsed "A House To Live In" being presented on January 8th and 9th and is urging as many people as possible to purchase tickets and attend the performance. Part of the funds received will go to the Hickman family.

Enclosed you will find tickets to the production. If you are unable to purchase the tickets will you please return them to the Hickman Defense Committee, 4919 South Parkway. Again, thank you for your past cooperation and hoping to see you either January 8th or 9th, I remain

Sincerely yours,
Willoughby Abner
Willoughby Abner, Chairman

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Building Service Employees International Union, AFL, Chicago Council
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Workers Defense League

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Alex Blackman—Newark, New Jersey
Frieda Charles—New York, N. Y.
Jean Simon—Los Angeles, Calif.
Bernice Stark—Morgantown, W. Virginia
Arthur Sternberg—St. Paul, Minn.

October 15, 1947

Dear Hal and Lou,

Enclosed is a summary of the Hickman case, which you are undoubtedly acquainted with from your own sources. We recently held a good meeting in Chicago with Tallulah Bankhead, Willard Motley, Mike Mann and many others speaking to a group of about 1,000 people.

Is it possible for you to set up a committee in St. Louis? Is it possible for the St. Louis Joint Council to make a contribution to the case?

The case goes to trial October 27th. We'd very much appreciate hearing from you by then. I understand that Lou will probably be in town next week; will be glad to give you any further details if you want them.

Fraternally,

Sid Lens.

PS - Our Local has set up four or five basketball teams. I spoke to you when I was in St. Louis about the possibility of one of your teams coming up here to play us a game. Let me know if it's feasible.

No. 10 9/9 1947

Received of Local 329 - Bldg Comm

Fifty Dollars

Contribution

Thank you

$50.00 BJ Hickman Defense Com

NO. 26-5

WILLOUGHBY ABNER, Chairman BERNICE HOWARD, Secretary CHARLES CHIAKULAS, Treasurer

Hickman Defense Committee

4619 SOUTH PARKWAY
Telephone BOU. 8942
CHICAGO, 15

West Side Branch
WEST SIDE CIVIC CENTER
1841 W. ROOSEVELT RD.
CHICAGO, ILL.

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DOC WILLIAMS
HUGH WILL
JOHN YANCEY
EDITH ZASLOW

Dear Friend:

Thank you very much for your generous contribution to the defense of James Hickman.

We assure you that this money will be of great assistance in helping to free Mr. Hickman of the murder charge on which he is now being held in jail.

Sincerely yours,

HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE

BY: Charles Chiakulas
CHARLES CHIAKULAS,
Treasurer

CC:BM

WILLOUGHBY ABNER, Chairman. BERNICE HOWARD, Secretary CHARLES CHIAKULAS, Treasurer

Hickman Defense Committee

4619 SOUTH PARKWAY
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EDITH ZASLOW

December 3, 1947

Dear Friend:

The trial of James Hickman, Negro steelworker who shot his landlord, ended Saturday November 15 with a "hung" jury. The members of this august body were unable to agree on a verdict. Unquestionably a majority of them were for acquittal, but another vocal group was for conviction.

The eight day trial was dramatic and tense every moment. Mrs. Hickman told a simple story of having met her husband when she was only 12 years old, having married at the age of 16, brought nine children into the world and their life as sharecroppers until 1945. The family earned as little as $28 for a whole year.

When war came, Hickman was at first inducted into the Army and then told to get a defense job when a ruling came down not to induct men over 36. He came to Chicago, got a job and then set about to find a home for his family. The trials and tribulations of this highly religious and family-conscious worker made tears well up in the eyes of many an onlooker in the crowded courtroom. One landlord wanted Hickman to buy a share of the building, pay some $50 odd a month for 25 years and then $79 after that. Time after time landlords had vacancies but refused to rent them to Hickman because he had small children. Rental agencies preyed on him and took his money.

Finally David Coleman put Hickman into an attic 14 feet by 12 feet, pending a "vacancy" on another floor of a four room flat. Hickman was not only forced to give Coleman a $100 bonus, but he had to pay a $23 service charge to a woman at a real estate office - all out of his meager savings of less than $200. Mrs. Hickman and their son Willis described the horrible situation of living in a "home" without gas, electric, toilet, or running water. They described the threats that Coleman made to burn the building down unless the tenants moved out. Coleman was anxious to convert the apartments into more lucrative kitchenettes. The son, Willis, testified that Coleman was in the building on the night of the fire. Another witness stated that Coleman took his own belongings out of the fire-trap a few days before the

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fire which took the life of four Hickman children; that he abused the tenants, cut off their water and threatened frequently to burn them out.

Willis described in detail the great tragedy of the January 16, 1947 fire, how the smoke engulfed the room and made it impossible for him to see his mother or his five brothers and sisters; how he finally found his mother by hearing her voice in a far corner; how he lowered her to the third floor and then to the second floor and how he himself then lost his footing, fell to the ground and broke his collarbone. The four youngest children, in the meantime, were trapped and cruelly burned to death.

Hickman himself described in great detail the growing compulsion that made him confront Coleman exactly six months later and the events that led to the shooting. He was an excellent, sincere and altogether credible witness. Two outstanding psychiatrists confirmed the defense position of "temporary insanity".

The Hickman Defense Committee is not surprised at the failure to gain an acquittal. We bitterly condemn the social system which was oblivious of the housing and personal difficulties of a law-abiding and absolutely harmless family, but now tries to prosecute the father for a crime which he is not guilty of. It seems to us that the Hickman case epitomized the whole brutal housing shortage, racial restrictions for Negro tenants, and many other evils of the post-war world. To permit this man to be convicted, while thousands of landlords are waxing fat on circumstances which may lead to future Hickman cases, is an insult to any man with a progressive point of view. The Hickman case is a challenge to all liberal forces: does a society which attempts to convict a man of a "crime" have to undertake responsibility for its own lethargy and criminal neglect or doesn't it? Hickman told the court how he tried to have Coleman arrested for refusing to refund to him his $100; how he tried to get a government agency to enforce an agreement to give him his four room apartment or give him his $100 so that he might look for another apartment. No one helped this family when it needed help, yet now the state mechanically and "legalistically" is trying to railroad Hickman to jail. IT MUST NOT HAPPEN!

The Hickman committee again appeals to you for help. We're going to see this thing through to the finish. You can do three things:

1- Help us with additional funds. The new trial starts January 5th. $300 is needed to print the record and hundreds more for publicity and other expenses.
2- Strengthen and enlarge your Hickman Defense Committee. The only effective weapon that will bring Hickman's release is mass pressure, publicity, and protest.
3- Send a wire or a letter to States Attorney William Touhy, Chicago Illinois, and request that the charges be dropped.

FREE JAMES HICKMAN!!!!!!

Fraternally,

Willoughby Abner

FOR RELEASE

Hickman Defense Committee
4819 South Parkway ROU 6942
November 6, 1947

On the eve of the trial of James Hickman, accused of murdering his landlord, David Coleman, the Hickman Defense Committee composed of representatives of over 750,000 workers and liber-minded people in the United States from New York to Los Angeles, today issued the following statement:

"Although James Hickman stands in the defendant's dock today it is society which is really on trial. Hickman is guilty of nothing; our social order is guilty of reneging on its promises for adequate housing, for equality and democracy for Negroes so that restrictive covenants and ghetto shall be eliminated. Society has created the conditions which make Hickmen crimes and Hickman tragedies inevitable. Society is unconcerned about the loss of Hickman's four children; it is and has been unconcerned about the miserable housing conditions that Hickman and his nine person family had to live under. The same government which failed to heed the need of Hickman and millions of other Hickmans is now trying to convict Hickman for its own crimes, its own failures.

"The Hickman Defense Committee has resolved that this shall not happen. Our committee has cast the light of publicity in a dozen large communities on the Hickman tragedy. Hickman committees and representatives are now functioning in New York, New Jersey, St. Paul, Los Angeles, Detroit, Akron and various other places. We intend to extend these committees so that the whole nation is aroused by the shameful circumstances of a society which is accusing Hickman for its own crimes.

"Lately in Chicago the basis for other Hickman cases has been laid, in such incidents as the Ohio Street fire. By tolerating the restrictive covenant, by loosely enforcing fire ordinances, and by failing to provide adequate and low cost housing the state, federal and local government are guilty of contributing to such tragedies as the Hickman tragedy. In all [redacted] should not now try to prosecute Hickman further."

The Chicago Negro Art Theatre

PRESENTS

A HOUSE TO LIVE IN

DuSABLE AUDITORIUM — 49th & STATE ST.

CURTAIN 8:30 p. m.

385

THURS. JAN. 8
FRI. JAN. 9

DONATION
65c

ENDORSED BY THE HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE

The Chicago Negro Art Theatre

PRESENTS

A HOUSE TO LIVE IN

DuSABLE AUDITORIUM — 49th & STATE ST.

CURTAIN 8:30 p. m.

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FRI. JAN. 9

DONATION
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ENDORSED BY THE HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

CENTRAL OFFICE - HICKMAN DEFENSE COMM.

PERIOD OF SEPT. 1, 1947 to SEPT. 30,1947

INCOME		EXPENDITURES		
CONTRIBUTIONS FROM INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS	$1,727.25	Expense to Frank Fried		$ 40.00
		rent		6.00
		postage		86.75
		stationery & printing		240.34
		phone		19.00
		fees to attorneys and psychiatrists		600.00
		9/27 mtg. expense		
		posters	10.00	
		Sun ad	58.00	
		transport.	13.00	
		sound truck	60.00	141.00
		collection cans		28.00
		bank charges		4.20
		newspapers		5.75
		miscellaneous		3.50
TOTAL INCOME	$1,727.25	TOTAL EXPENDITURES		$1174.54

CASH BALANCE FOR SEPT.	$553.71
less petty cash on hand	4.00
TOTAL CASH BALANCE	$548.71

FINANCIAL STATEMENT
CENTRAL OFFICE - HICKMAN DEFENSE COMM.
FROM SEPT. 1, 1947 TO SEPT. 30, 1947.

INCOME		EXPENDITURES		
Donations from individuals	$ 354.10	Expense to F. Fried		$ 40.00
" " churches	20.00	Rent		6.00
" " A. V. C. chapters	133.95	postage		86.75
" " mass meeting of 9/28/47	292.00	Stationery & Printing		121.34
" " AFL Unions	465.00	Phone		19.00
" " CIO Unions	312.20	Fees to attorneys and psychiatrists		600.00
Miscellaneous donations	150.00	9/28 mtg. expense		
		Posters	33.00	
		Sun ad	58.00	
		transport.	13.00	
		sound truck	60.00	
		leaflets	96.00	260.00
		Collection cans		28.00
		bank charges		4.20
		newspapers		5.75
		miscellaneous expense		3.50
TOTAL INCOME	$1,727.25	TOTAL EXPENDITURES		$1,174.54

CASH BALANCE FOR MONTH OF SEPT.	$552.71
less petty cash on hand	4.00
TOTAL CASH BALANCE	$548.71

WEST SIDE BRANCH - FROM SEPT. 1, 1947 to SEPT. 30

INCOME		EXPENDITURES	
Donations from individuals	$ 187.53	Expense to F. Fried	$ 15.00
" " churches	254.68	Fees to attorneys and psychiatrists	400.00
Collections at meetings	46.73	To Mrs. Hickman	10.00
		to Mr. Hickman	2.00
		Mimeo materials and posters	10.90
		miscellaneous expense	3.00
TOTAL INCOME	$488.94	TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 440.90

CASH BALANCE AS OF SEPT. 30 - $48.04

JOINT INCOME AS OF SEPT. 30	$2,216.19
JOINT EXPENDITURES AS OF SEPT. 30	1,615.44
JOINT CASH BALANCE AS OF SEPT. 30	$ 600.75

WILLOUGHBY ABNER, Chairman | BERNICE HOWARD, Secretary | CHARLES CHIAKULAS, Treasurer

Hickman Defense Committee

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RALPH HELSTEIN — UPW
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SIDNEY JONES
LEO LERNER — Negro newspapers
GEORGE McNULTY
MICHAEL MANN — CIO
RICHARD MEYER
ALICE MERRIT
LOREN MILLER
ROBERT MING
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A. J. MUSTE
CARL REINER — Actor
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561

Official News Release

CHICAGO INDUSTRIAL UNION COUNCIL

OFFICIAL CENTRAL BODY, COOK COUNTY ILLINOIS

205 W. Wacker Drive - Telephone Franklin 2482 - Chicago 6, Illinois

ALBERT TOWERS, *President* — MICHAEL MANN, *Secretary*

Public Relations Department
WILLOUGHBY ABNER, *Director*
and 1st Vice-President

October 10, 1947

HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE PROTESTS

FIRE ORDINANCE VIOLATIONS

Charging that there is a strong indication that the fire at 942 W. Ohio St. today, which took the lives of 11 women and children, may be the result of racial tension in the area against Negro tenants, a delegation of the Hickman Defense Committee, composed of Willoughby Abner, first Vice President of the Chicago CIO Industrial Union Council, Sid Lens, director of the AFL Building Service Local 329, and Henry McGee, President of the Chicago Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, today requested that Mayor Kennelly propose amendments to the fire ordinance which will put violators in jail, rather than permit them to get off with light fines.

The rapid spread of the Ohio Street fire is similar to the spread of the fire last January 18th at 1733 Washburne which took the lives of four of James Hickman's children and led to the subsequent shooting of the landlord.

The delegation today was an outgrowth of a mass meeting of 1,000 people held July 28th on the South Side, addressed by Tallulah Bankhead, Willard Mottley, Michael Mann, demanding the freedom of Hickman, Negro steelworker awaiting trial October 27th in the shooting of the landlord David Coleman. The mass meeting instructed the Hickman Defense Committee, 4619 South Parkway, to visit Mayor Kennelly and lay the facts on violation of fire ordinances before him.

Today's delegation pointed out that there had been 751 fires in the three month period between November 1946 and January 1947 in the South Side area bounded by 26th and 55th Streets. Fourteen people died as a result of these fires and many were injured. According to the delegation the causes of these fires were:

That fire regulations were flagrantly disregarded, that the dwellings were old, that they were overcrowded - as many as 90,000 people live in a square mile -, that too much waste is permitted to accumulate in the area, that cooking and heating facilities are inadequate, that inspection is spotty and inadequate, and that fire insurance companies refuse to insure buidings in the Negro areas and that as a consequence landlords are lax.

The delegation requested that:

1- Mayor Kennelly see to it that there be immediate and continuous inspection of dwelling units.

2- That the fire ordinances be rigidly enforced.

3- That the city council amend the present fire ordinance so that landlords be subject to jail sentence rather than just fines.

4- That the amendment also provide that the city have the right to declare any building which violates the fire ordinance a public nuisance and that landlords be kept in jail until such nuisance is abated.

At the request of Mayor Kennelly the delegation gave specific cases of violation of the fire ordinance. In one particularly flagrant case the Mayor promised to have the building inspected immediately.

FOR RELEASE
SEPTEMBER 12, 1947

HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
CALL 3RD HDQS. - STATE 5252

STARS SUPPORT HICKMAN

Stars of stage and screen rallied today to the support of James Hickman, Negro steelworker accused of killing his landlord David Coleman as an outgrowth of a fire in January which took the lives of four Hickman children.

Tallulah Bankhead, well-known stage and screen star and daughter of the late Senator Bankhead, will deliver an address at the Hickman Defense Rally September 28th at the Metropolitan Community Church, 4100 South Parkway. Miss Bankhead, now appearing in "Private Lives", is a member of the advisory committee of the Hickman Defense Committee.

Richard Rober, male lead in "Dear Yesterday", will also appear on the program with Miss Bankhead, along with many well known figures in the labor movement.

Carl Reiner, star of "Call Me Mister", has warmly endorsed the work of the committee and is likewise a member of the advisory committee.

Harold Russell, academy award winner for his leading role in "The Best Years of our Lives" and handless veteran of World War II, issues a statement to Willoughby Abner, First Vice-President of the Chicago Industrial Union Council and Chairman of the Defense Committee warmly endorsing the work of the Committee and expressing his sympathy for the Hickman family.

"The injustices and human suffering", the statement reads, "that can be brought about because of inadequate housing, flimsy tenements, congested ghettos; the vicious practice of restrictive covenants can scarcely be more graphically illustrated than in the tragic case of the James Hickmans, a Negro family. The burning to death of four of the Hickman children as flames swept through the one room attic firetrap they were forced to call home; the mother's leap from the flaming three story tenement barely escaping with her life, the subsequent seething of emotions which ended in the father's fatal shooting of the landlord all point out a sequence of tragic events having their origin in the inhuman housing conditions under which this family was forced to live."

September 11, 1947

Mr. Eddie Cantor
Ambassador East Hotel
State & East Goethe
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Cantor:

Rabbi Weinstein informs me that you will be unable to speak at our mass meeting on behalf of James Hickman the 28th of this month. I regret very much that other plans take you elsewhere, since I am sure your presence at such a meeting would have struck a great blow against all kinds of prejudice in this city and would have helped cement a feeling of unity amongst minorities.

I know that Rabbi Weinstein has explained the case to you in detail and I am sure from your record as a champion of minority rights that you are sympathetic. May I suggest therefore that you agree to become an honorary member of our advisory board so that your name and reputation may be used to enroll others in this cause?

Our present concern is not only to prepare the defense of Hickman, but since the father of what was recently a family of nine is now in jail, we are duty-bound to raise funds for the welfare of the remaining members of the family as well. The mother and an older son have sustained permanent injuries as a result of their jump from the flaming building. The other children are still too young to work.

Can you help us financially as well as morally in this case? We would very much appreciate any contribution you care to make - and above all we would like your support morally so that we can enlist other men in the world of art and science for this work.

Sincerely,

Sid Lens
For the Hickman Defense Committee

For further details you can call me directly at State 3352.

Hickman Defense Committee

4619 SOUTH PARKWAY
Telephone BOU. 8842
CHICAGO, 15

West Side Branch
WEST SIDE CIVIC CENTER
1841 W. ROOSEVELT RD.
CHICAGO, ILL.

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RABBI JACOB WEINSTEIN
DOC WILLIAMS
HUGH WILL
JOHN YANCEY
EDITH ZASILOW

September 9, 1947

Mr. Eddie Cantor
Ambassador East Hotel
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Cantor:

Rabbi Weinstein, who is a member of our advisory committee has suggested that I send you the enclosed memorandum on the James Hickman case. Rabbi Weinstein intends to speak to you personally tomorrow (Wednesday) about the possibility of your speaking at a mass meeting to be held Sunday September 28 in one of the large Baptist Churches on the South Side in Hickman's behalf.

The Hickman case has already attracted considerable attention. Supporting the defense are the AFL Building Service Council (with many other AFL organizations on the verge of endorsing it), the Chicago Industrial Union Council, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Chicago Area Council of the American Veterans Committee, and many artists and writers such as Talullah Bankhead, Carl Reiner of Call Me Mister, Richard Rober of Born Yesterday, Willard Motley, author of Knock on Any Door, and many others.

I hope we shall be able to enlist your aid in this worthwhile effort. For further information you can contact me at my office, State 3352.

Sincerely,

Sid Lens
AFL Building Service Union Local 329

September 8, 1947

Dear Miss Sterling:

Enclosed is a memorandum on the Hickman case. We're planning a mass meeting September 28th on the South Side and would like to have you and Mr. Rober speak at this affair.

The Hickman case has been endorsed by the Chicago Council of the Building Service Union AFL (representing some 39,000 workers), Chicago CIO Council (200,000), the Chicago section of the AVC, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, and innumerable prominent people in the arts and sciences. Willard Motley, author of "Knock on Any Door" is quite active in the defense, as well as many others. Talulah Bankhead and Carl Reiner have endorsed the case and are now on the advisory committee.

I'd appreciate it if you would telephone me sometime tomorrow and arrange for me to discuss the matter with you in greater detail. I have been advised by many theatre friends of yours that you are interested in liberal matters of this sort and from what I have seen of Mr. Rober on the tennis courts I assume he will be interested too.

My phone is State 3352.

Sincerely,

Sid Lens

HICKMAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE

Dear Friend: Aug. 9, 1947

You have no doubt read in the newspapers about the case of James Hickman, a Chicago steel worker, who is being held by the Grand Jury on a murder charge resulting from the death of his landlord. The indictment, however, does not tell the whole story. Behind this indictment stands a story which should move every man and woman who has a sense of justice to take a serious interest in the case of Mr. Hickman.

James Hickman, his wife, and their children were tenants in a building managed by David Coleman on the West Side of Chicago. They lived in a tiny attic room without gas, electricity, running water or fire escapes. They had been living there temporarily after having paid for a flat on a lower floor in the same building. The landlord, Coleman, instead of living up to his promise, ordered this family out of the building in order to be able to cut up the building into smaller flats and thereby realize an even greater profit on rent collections.

Faced by the acute housing shortage, and blocked by the restrictive covenants which prevented the Hickmans, a Negro family, from moving into many Chicago neighborhoods, they were unable to move. A short while later a fire swept through the attic flat and four of Mr. Hickman's children were burned to death. Dazed by the loss of his four children and resentful of his housing conditions, Mr. Hickman shot Coleman. He is now being charged with murder and his case comes up in September.

As you can see from the above, justice will not be carried out if Mr. Hickman is tried in the fashion of a criminal. The real criminals in this case are the real estate interests who promote restrictive covenants which drive Negro tenants into fire traps where they are at the mercy of ruthless landlords. The greatest criminal of all is the housing shortage which permits unscrupulous landlords to mercilessly exploit helpless tenants. The case of James Hickman is the case of all those who are interested in justice for people of the lower income brackets.

All of us are duty bound to help in the defense of James Hickman. The undersigned civic and labor leaders are sponsoring the establishment of a City-wide Defense Committee to aid in the defense of Mr. Hickman. You, as an outstanding person in civic affairs, can be of invaluable assistance in this work. We are therefore extending to you an invitation to attend a dinner meeting for the purpose of setting up the defense committee. The dinner will be held at the Central Y.M.C.A. Cafeteria, 19 South LaSalle St., at 6:00 P.M. on Thursday, August 14, 1947.

Your support and cooperation in this matter will go a long way toward bringing to light the social injustices which are responsible for this case.

If you are unable to attend the dinner meeting but wish to become a member, please acknowledge by writing to Hickman Defense Committee, Chicago C.I.O. Council, 205 W. Wacker Drive, Attention Willoughby Abner.

Very truly yours,

REV. JOSEPH EVANS
DR. JAMES LUTHER ADAMS
WILLOUGHBY ABNER
1st V.P. -CIO COUNCI
CHARLES CHIAKULOS
Pres. - Local 477
UAW - CIO
BERNIS JOHNSON
Pres. - West side
NAACP Youth Council